



THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

---

**ONLINE REPUTATION**  
FOR AUTO DEALERS



Written By: Patrick Mower

# Contents

<b>Chapter 1: Introduction to Reputation Management</b>	<b>3</b>
Why is Online Reputation Important?	3
Is there ROI in Reputation Management?	4
What is a “Good” Reputation?	5
What are the Elements of a Good Reputation?	5
<b>Chapter 2: Key Review Platforms for Auto Dealers</b>	<b>7</b>
Do I really Need a Listing on Every Review Site?	7
Which Review Platforms Should I Focus On?	8
How Do I Claim or Create a Listing For My Dealership?	10
What if There Are Multiple Listings for My Dealership on the Same Site?	13
<b>Chapter 3: Managing Reviews</b>	<b>15</b>
How Can I Get More Reviews?	15
How Can I Improve Review Scores?	18
<b>Chapter 4: Managing Responses</b>	<b>20</b>
How Do I Respond to Positive Reviews?	20
How Do I Respond to Mixed Reviews?	20
How Do I Respond to Negative Reviews?	22

# Chapter 1: Introduction to Reputation Management

As a business owner, your success is linked directly to your reputation. This applies to every industry from retail to realtors, and auto dealers are no different. It used to be that a business's reputation depended almost entirely on word of mouth, but that is no longer the case. With more social media and review platforms than you can shake a stick at, business owners everywhere are taking to the internet to manage and improve their reputations online.

Reputation management can sound intimidating - or worse *expensive* - but that doesn't need to be the case. In this e-book we will go over everything you need to know to manage your online reputation. Sure, you can always hire a vendor to do this for you, and many dealerships do.

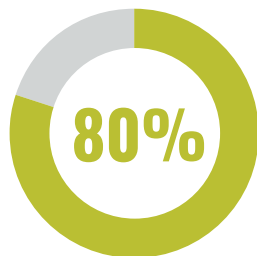
But it is absolutely possible to manage on your own, and we will give you all the tools you need to do it!

## Why is Online Reputation Important?

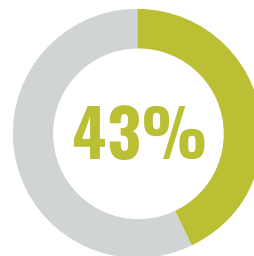
We live in a sharing economy. Peer-to-peer commerce sites like eBay, Amazon, and Airbnb have become ubiquitous, and with their success consumers have come to trust reviews from other users when making purchasing decisions. We could throw statistics at you, but at the end of the day, think about how you behave as a customer. Do you read online reviews before you make a major purchase? If you give someone at a business a compliment or a criticism, don't you prefer that person to acknowledge it?



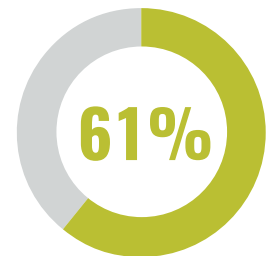
of all consumers say buying decisions were influenced by online reviews. [1](#)



of auto buyers use the internet to assist in the shopping process. [2](#)



of drivers conduct an online search to decide where to service their car. [3](#)



of auto consumers will read reviews before doing business. [4](#)

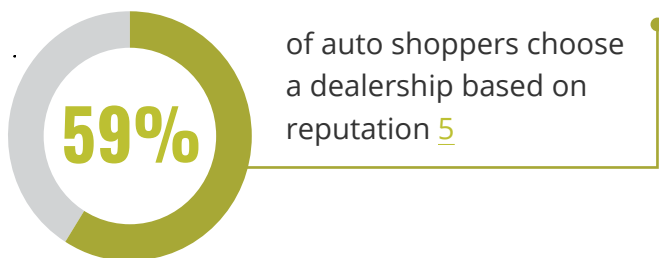
So we know consumers are reading reviews about your business. And reviews matter more and more each day for auto dealers. In the past, customers would visit roughly four dealerships during the shopping process. Now, however, [67% of customers only visit 1 or 2 dealerships](#)

[before making a decision](#). This means that they could be ruling out buying from you before they even step foot on the lot. Having a good online reputation is your best tool to make sure your dealership isn't ruled out early on in their research process.

## Is there ROI in Reputation Management?

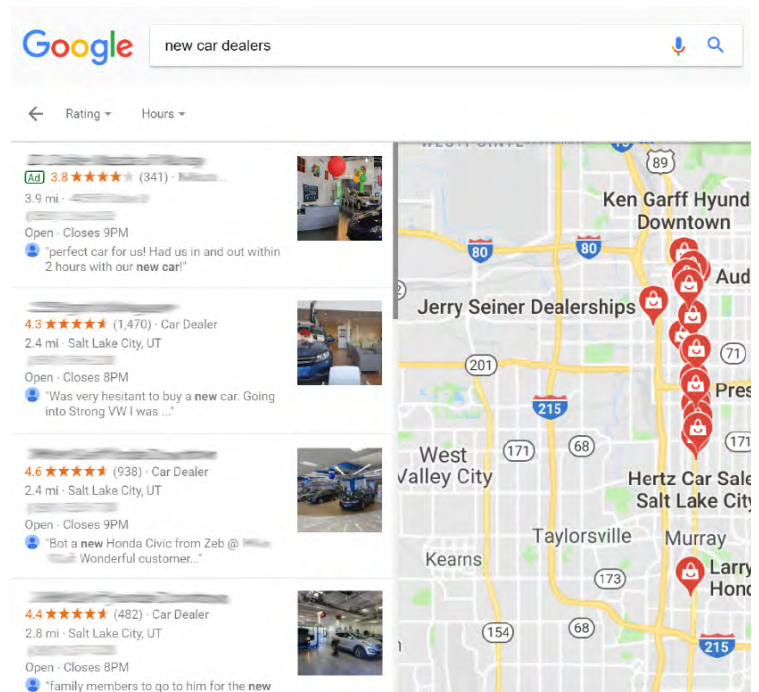
We know that customers are visiting fewer dealerships than they did in the past, but do we know reputation management is the answer? Well, yes. Yes, we do. For one, we know that [38% of auto buyers check online reviews](#) when deciding which dealership to visit. In addition to that, a recent study found that [customers who read positive reviews are more and more likely to get in touch with a business directly](#) over the phone, via email, or by visiting in person.

ROI for reputation management can be somewhat difficult to calculate, but investing in it could very well be the difference between someone stopping by your lot or your competitor's down the road. Once a customer steps onto your lot the chances they will buy from you skyrocket. With that in mind, it is important to do everything you can to not be ruled out early on in the research process, and making sure you have a good online reputation is one of the easiest and cheapest ways to accomplish this.



Your reputation can also have an impact on the effectiveness of paid advertising efforts. Whether the ads are on Google, or one of the car specific sites like Cars.com or CarGurus, paid ads can be a great way to get highly qualified leads from people looking to buy. However, these ads won't be nearly as effective if your reputation isn't as good as the other dealers that appear below your ad. This can mean wasted ad budgets on sites like Cars.com where you pay for each time one of your ads is shown to a potential customer.

Here is an example of what a user might see when searching for a car dealer in their area. Notice how the listing at the top marked as an ad shows an average rating of 3.8. This isn't a terrible score when viewed on its own, but the ad will likely not perform very well when paired up against the other dealers with higher scores.



Not only are your ads much less likely to convert if your reputation isn't as good as others in the search results, but it can make it more expensive for you when they *do* convert. With Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising, customers see your ads based on search terms and other criteria you specify in each campaign, but you only pay when someone actually clicks on the ad. The amount you spend for each click depends on a variety of factors including how often your ads are clicked when displayed to users, and a low Click Through Rate (CTR) increases the cost. This means that you could be paying more for each click than a competitor running a campaign for the exact same search terms!

## What is a “Good” Reputation?

Possibly the most important thing to remember is that online reputation is *relative*. At first glance, a 4-star average rating on Google seems pretty good and might cause some dealers to think that they don't need to worry about reputation management. But that is only one piece of the puzzle and completely ignores other important aspects that consumers consider when deciding which dealership to visit. A 4-star rating is only “good” as long as it compares favorably to the competition. The same rating doesn't look so good when compared to a nearby competitor with a 4.5. Similarly, a 4-star rating with only a few reviews carries less weight than that of a competitor with a similar rating and dozens of reviews.

*When setting goals for your dealership's reputation management program, it is important to see how your main competitors are doing to accurately determine where you need to be.*

## What are the Elements of a Good Reputation?

Average review scores are typically the focus of online reputation initiatives and for a good reason. They are one of the first things customers see when reading reviews for a company they are considering doing business with. With that said, they are but one metric in evaluating your online reputation, and are far from the only thing auto dealers should pay attention to.

**The elements of a strong online reputation fall into one of three categories: Key Review Platforms, Managing Reviews, and Managing Responses.**

## Key Review Platforms for Auto Dealers

*Key Pages* - Every business should be managing their presence on sites like Google, Facebook, and Yelp. Auto dealers should also maintain a presence on auto-specific sites like DealerRater, CarGurus, and Cars.com. There are other sites like Edmunds or CarDealerCheck and KelleyBlueBook that also have dealer reviews, but their review volume is typically so low that many dealers will choose to ignore them. That's generally fine, but if your dealership receives a lot of leads or referrals from these other sites, it would be unwise to neglect them. Not only does having a listing on all of these sites help you cast a wider net to potential customers, but it has additional SEO benefit for your dealership (which we will discuss more later).

*Profile Consistency* - It is important to have consistency across all review platforms. Make sure details like your dealership's name, address, and phone number match on all business profiles.

## Managing Reviews

*Review Quantity* - One thing consumers do when evaluating a businesses reputation is check the number of reviews they have. This serves as a measure of legitimacy in the belief that a larger sample size will provide a more accurate representation of customer experiences.

*Review Recency* - Another measure of legitimacy among consumers is the recency of reviews. They understand that things change over time and people in an organization can come and go. For this reason, recent reviews tend to be more trusted than older ones.

*Review Quality* - As mentioned earlier, average review scores are powerful because they are the first thing people see when evaluating a business's reputation. This makes review scores one of the most important elements to consider. Another measure of review quality has to do with the comments that accompany the star rating. Do they provide enough detail to be helpful to other prospective customers?

## Managing Responses

*Response Rate* - An often overlooked element of your online reputation is responding to reviews -

especially negative ones. You would never dream of ignoring a customer offering a compliment or criticism of your dealership in person. Ignoring your customers online is even worse because it is posted publicly for other customers to see.

*Response Time* - Responses to reviews are only helpful if they are received in a timely manner after the review was written. Responding to old reviews doesn't do as much good because many potential customers have already seen the review. Responding as soon as possible limits the number of people who see the unresolved review.



## Chapter 2: Key Review Platforms for Auto Dealers

With the countless websites collecting reviews for business's it can be hard to know where to focus your efforts. There are sites like Google, Facebook, and Yelp that collate reviews for businesses of all types. In addition to the those, sites like DealerRater, Cars.com, and CarGurus provide platforms geared specifically toward automotive reviews. Dealers should maintain a presence on all of these sites at the minimum, as well as any other sites that regularly provide quality leads and referrals.

### Do I Really Need a Listing on *Every* Review Site?

Having and managing a business profile on all of the review sites listed above - even those with relatively low referral traffic or review volume - is important for a few reasons.

#### Free Advertising

The first and most obvious reason you should have a listing on all of the key auto dealer review sites is that these are free platforms through which you can get exposure to potential customers. It would be a bad idea for any business owner to turn down an opportunity for what is essentially free advertising. Ensuring your dealership has a presence on all of the major review sites is an easy way to increase your potential audience and is the first step in taking control of your online reputation.

#### SEO Value of Review Platforms

Another important reason for establishing profiles on essential review sites is the SEO

value they add for your dealership website. SEO stands for Search Engine Optimization and refers to techniques you can use to help your website appear higher in search results for queries related to your business. Almost nobody looks beyond the first page of search results, so it is crucial that you do everything you can to appear near the top. And while Google and others are notoriously tight-lipped about precisely what goes into their formulas, SEO experts believe [reviews account for up to 10% of your ranking in search engine results.](#)

#### NAP Score

One of the ways review platforms can help your SEO efforts is by contributing to what is known as a NAP score, (Name, Address, Phone Number). Search engines like it when your business listings are consistent throughout the internet because that is an indicator of accurate information. Businesses with the same name, address, and phone number on all of their internet listings score higher than those who don't. A low NAP score can contribute to lower placement in search results.

A common cause of NAP score issues is when a dealership is sold or otherwise rebranded. Sometimes dealers change their addresses slightly to provide two "independent" locations for different brands. Whatever the cause, you will want to make sure your profiles have been updated with your new business information as soon as possible. In addition to your name, address, and phone number take the opportunity to update any other information like website URLs and logos to ensure consistency across platforms.

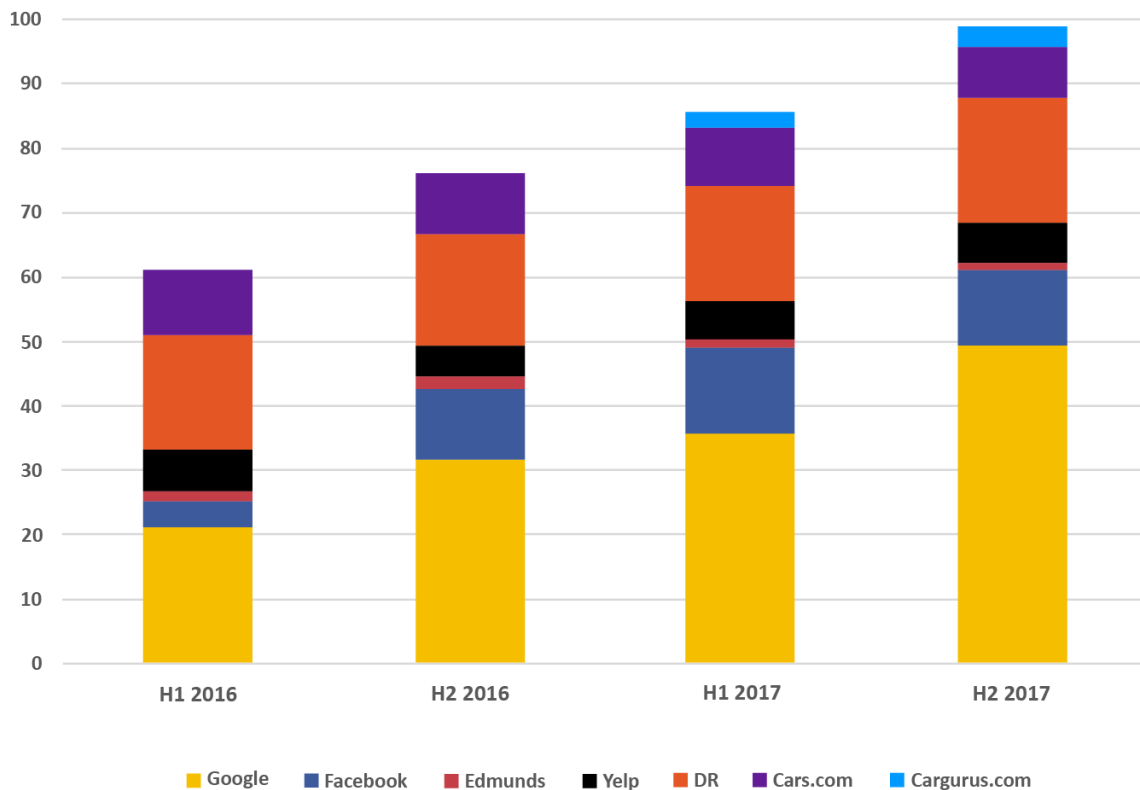
## Fresh Content

Another important way reviews impact your SEO efforts is by providing search engines with fresh content. Google understands that recent information is more relevant than older information, and current reviews indicate that people have recently engaged with your

business. Search engines don't differentiate between positive and negative reviews, but instead see review activity in and of itself as an indication that your business is relevant to current customers. Simply obtaining reviews, good or bad, can help your SEO efforts and drive additional traffic to your website.

## Which Review Platforms Should I Focus On?

Industry Average 6-mo. Review Volume by Site





## Google

---

Google is the most important review platform for any business, and auto dealers are no different. The search giant now accounts for over half of the volume of reviews auto dealers receive. Not only is it the most significant in terms of review volume, but Google also displays reviews in the Google My Business sidebar for dealer-specific searches so consumers are exposed to them when searching for your website, phone number, or trying to find directions. “Reviews From the Web” are also often displayed further down on the page, allowing people to see average scores from multiple platforms at once.

## facebook

---

Facebook has nowhere near the same review volume as Google, but should still be a priority for any auto dealer. One advantage Facebook has over other platforms is its ability to connect users to people they know. Rather than reading reviews from complete strangers, Facebook can show reviews from people in a users network. Reviews from people you know can carry more weight than that of an anonymous user, making facebook reviews potentially much more powerful.



DealerRater accounts for just under 20% of the average dealer’s reviews making it the second largest source of reviews for auto dealers. Like many review platforms, DealerRater offers a paid service, but you don’t need to be a paying customer to receive reviews on the

site. Consumers have little reason to come to DealerRater.com for anything other than to read specific dealership reviews; the site, therefore, is potentially compelling to consumers who may be choosing between dealerships but lacks the broader strength of several of the other Key Sites.



Unlike several of the other Key Sites, Cars.com maintains more of a dealership focus, perhaps because of its strong dealership advertising platform. The site provides strong SEO value for dealership search terms. Generally, most dealerships do not see huge volume here, though Cars.com does permit select reputation management vendors to ‘push’ qualified reviews directly to the site. As a result, some dealerships see significant review volume on Cars.com.



Yelp in many ways kicked off the online review boom, and it remains an important site for many local businesses, particularly in urban areas and on the West Coast. In rural and suburban areas, however, Yelp tends to receive fewer reviews than many other sites making the relative importance of Yelp highly dependant on geographic location. In November 2017, Yelp announced that it would begin penalizing companies for soliciting reviews from customers by reducing their search ranking on Yelp or even flagging their Yelp page with a “Consumer Alert.” It remains unclear what impact these penalties may have, but

it's likely the industry will see fewer new reviews on Yelp going forward as many dealerships stop soliciting reviews on this site.



CarGurus began in 2006 as an automotive community blog for consumers to discuss cars, dealerships, and mechanics. It soon grew into an advertising platform for dealerships as well as a consumer-focused automotive research and shopping site. Because of its roots, however, it has maintained an emphasis on consumer feedback and reviews in general. CarGurus continues to post rapid growth since their IPO in October 2017. It now rivals many of the other Key Sites in review quantity.



Edmunds is a major site for car shoppers to research models and find available inventory, and many dealerships advertise heavily there. As a review platform, however, Edmunds typically has far fewer reviews than competitors and makes up less than 0.5% of the total reviews left across key review platforms. In February 2018, Edmunds announced that they would no longer support API integrations with online reputation companies, signaling a shift away from online reviews entirely. With that said, if your dealership sees significant referral traffic or lead generation from Edmunds it would be unwise to neglect your reputation on the site.

## How Do I Claim or Create a Listing For My Dealership?

Sometimes platforms like Google, Facebook, or Yelp will create an "unverified" listing for your business if you haven't made one for yourself. Or sometimes a listing will have been created by a previous owner or other entity, but you don't have access to the account. In order to manage your online reputation, you will need to claim any listings for which you don't have login credentials. The process for each key site is slightly different, but they mostly follow the same process:

### 1. Go to the site in question

- If you do not already have a username/login for this site, you will need to create one at some point in this process

### 2. Search for your business

- Try different variations of your name, or just your address to find potential duplicate listings

### 3. Select matching listings or create a listing

### 4. Find the link to claim the page

- Look for things like "Is this your business?" near the profile photo or elsewhere on the page

### 5. Verify your business

- Review sites want to make sure you are who you say you are, so you will need to verify your location in some way. This typically involves them sending a postcard\* with a verification code to your location. Once you verify receipt of the code you have control of the listing.

### \* Verification by Postcard

These postcards look almost exactly like junk mail. Unfortunately, this means it can be difficult for them to make it to the person in charge. Once you start the verification process it is important that everyone who even touches the mail at the dealership is aware that they are looking for a very important piece of junk mail, and know who to bring it to when found.

If you haven't done so already, consider creating a new email account specifically for your reputation management needs. Be sure to provide multiple password recovery options in case you lose access to the account. Linking all of your reputation profiles to a single account makes it much easier to manage a presence on multiple sites.

### Verification Postcard Example:



Hello from Google,

The verification code that Liam Neeson's Nissans requested from Google is below! Just follow the three steps below to finish verifying, and Liam Neeson's Nissans will be open for business on Google.

#### Steps to verify your business:

- 1 Visit [google.com/verifymybusiness](https://google.com/verifymybusiness)
- 2 Sign in to your Google account.
- 3 Enter your verification code and submit!

Your verification code:

**12345**

This code is unique to your business account and the particular listing you want to verify. Please do not share this code with anyone else, and know that Google will never call your business and ask for your code.

Need help? Visit us at [google.com/supportmybusiness](https://google.com/supportmybusiness) to learn more.



To create, claim, or otherwise manage your Google listing you will need to [create a Google My Business account](#). Once you have created your account you can go through the steps listed above. It is very uncommon for a dealership not to be listed on Google unless they are newly built. If you are unable to find your business on Google, be sure to search for just your address to see if it is listed under a different name. If you are still unable to find your dealership you can follow these [steps to create a Google listing](#).

Most dealers will only need to worry about claiming an existing listing. Once you have located it you can follow these steps to [request ownership of your Google listing](#). Once you have created or claimed your business listing you will need to [verify the location](#). Most businesses verify by postcard, but some have other options available to them. The options available to you will appear when you log in to initiate the verification process.

---

## facebook

Every business should have a Facebook page already. If you don't, you can go [here](#) to create one. But first, you should log in to the site and search for your business. It is possible that an unmanaged page has been created for your dealership based on public information. If the page is unmanaged, you'll see "Unofficial Page" below its cover photo. You can request to claim the page and become its admin.

Unlike other sites, customer reviews on Facebook Business pages can be turned on or off. If customers are unable to leave reviews on your Facebook page, click here for instructions on [how to enable reviews on Facebook](#).



Only paying DealerRater customers can respond to reviews, but for the reasons we discussed earlier, it is still important that your business is listed here. If you don't have an account, but want to make sure your dealership is listed on the site, go to [DealerRater.com/Reviews](#) and search for your business.

If you don't find your business, you will need to go to the [DealerRater.com/Dealers](#) and scroll to the bottom of the page until you see a link that says "Claim Your Dealership Now." Follow the prompts to find or create your listing. Login information will be sent to the contact information you provide.



Like DealerRater, Cars.com doesn't allow you to respond to reviews unless you are a paying customer. If you are not a paying customer, you should still check the site to make sure your dealership is listed. Go to Cars.com and scroll all the way to the bottom. Click the Car Dealers link under the Buying and Selling heading. Adjust the location filter and search through the results for a listing. If your dealership is not listed, you will need to contact Cars.com directly to have it added. Go to the [Cars.com Dealer Center](#) page, enter your dealership's information in the "Want More Info" box and add in the comments that you would like your dealership to be added.



Yelp offers a paid subscription option for businesses, but you don't need to be a paying customer to manage your account and respond to reviews. Go to Yelp and [search for your business](#). Duplicate listings are more common here. Be sure to try different variations of the name or just the address. If you find a listing for your business, you can click the Claim This Business button on the right side of the screen. Follow the prompts and follow the verification instructions to gain control of the listing. If you don't see any existing listings, click the "Add your business to Yelp" button at the bottom of the page.

See figure 1.1, page 14.



CarGurus offers free and paid account options for dealers wishing to use their site. First, you will need to [create your CarGurus account](#). Fill out the form and CarGurus will contact you with the next steps for account creation. Once you've created your account, you can take control of your listing on the site.



Like many of the sites with a paid subscription model, Edmunds' primary focus is their paying customers. If you are not a paying customer, you can still make sure your dealership is listed by going to Edmunds.com. Scroll all the way to the bottom of the page and click the "Find a Dealer" link under the "New Car Resources" heading. Select your city

from the "Most Popular [State] Cities table, or click the link to "Choose a different [State] car dealership."

Look for your dealership in the list that appears. If your listing is not displayed, you will need to [contact Edmunds directly](#) to have it added.

See figure 1.2, page 14.

## What if There Are Multiple Listings for My Dealership on the Same Site?

Duplicate listings are most common on Google, Facebook, and Yelp because of the way these sites use public information to create a comprehensive list of local businesses. Each site has a slightly different process for handling duplicate listings, but it typically involves flagging duplicates and waiting for the platform in question to approve the change. Check out the links below for site-specific instructions on managing duplicates.

[Remove or Report Duplicate Listings on Google](#)

[Merge Two Facebook Pages](#)

[Report Duplicate Business Pages on Yelp](#)

Figure 1.1

## Find and Claim your Yelp Business Page

**Street Address** Springfield, MO

**Business Name** Liam Neeson's Nissans

**Q Get Started**

0 results for **Liam Neeson's Nissans** near **Springfield, MO** [Need help?](#)

---

Sorry, there were no matches. Please try adjusting your search.

Can't find your business? [Add your business to Yelp](#)

Figure 1.2

- ### Most Popular Kansas Dealership Cities
- |                                         |                                           |                                             |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <a href="#">Derby Car Dealers</a>       | <a href="#">Junction City Car Dealers</a> | <a href="#">Newton Car Dealers</a>          |
| <a href="#">Dodge City Car Dealers</a>  | <a href="#">Kansas City Car Dealers</a>   | <a href="#">Olathe Car Dealers</a>          |
| <a href="#">El Dorado Car Dealers</a>   | <a href="#">Lawrence Car Dealers</a>      | <a href="#">Overland Park Car Dealers</a>   |
| <a href="#">Emporia Car Dealers</a>     | <a href="#">Leavenworth Car Dealers</a>   | <a href="#">Pittsburg Car Dealers</a>       |
| <a href="#">Garden City Car Dealers</a> | <a href="#">Leawood Car Dealers</a>       | <a href="#">Prairie Village Car Dealers</a> |
| <a href="#">Gardner Car Dealers</a>     | <a href="#">Lenexa Car Dealers</a>        | <a href="#">Salina Car Dealers</a>          |
| <a href="#">Great Bend Car Dealers</a>  | <a href="#">Liberal Car Dealers</a>       | <a href="#">Shawnee Car Dealers</a>         |
| <a href="#">Hays Car Dealers</a>        | <a href="#">Manhattan Car Dealers</a>     | <a href="#">Topeka Car Dealers</a>          |
| <a href="#">Hutchinson Car Dealers</a>  | <a href="#">Mission Car Dealers</a>       | <a href="#">Wichita Car Dealers</a>         |
- [Choose a different Kansas car dealership](#)
- [Choose a Kansas car dealership by County](#)



Now that you have profiles set up on all of the key review platforms for auto dealers you can begin to focus on managing your reviews. This is where you can make the most impact on your dealership's online reputation. We already know that unhappy customers are leaving reviews. While we should be doing everything in our power to achieve 100% customer satisfaction, the unfortunate reality is that there is no way to eliminate negative reviews entirely. We also know that, in most cases, negative experiences are far from the norm for your business. The prime directive of any auto dealer's reputation initiative should be to get as many customer reviews as possible to provide a more accurate

representation of the average customer experience.

### **How Can I Get More Reviews?**

There are many ways to increase the number of positive reviews. Depending on the situation, one option might be more convenient for a customer, or more effective for the dealer. We recommend the following methods:

#### *Training staff to ask for reviews*

One of the most important aspects of any strategy to increase the number of online

reviews from customers is training your staff to ask for them. Customers are considerably more likely to leave reviews if they are asked. Train your staff to capitalize on the customers' peak excitement by politely asking them to leave a review immediately after the purchase is complete.

Incentivising staff to ask for reviews is a great way to increase the number of reviews you receive. To preserve the value of the reviews generated it is important that the incentives encourage staff to ask for reviews, but not specific review scores. The goal is to get reviews that accurately describe the customer experience. Only counting 5-star reviews as a passing grade, or otherwise placing too much emphasis on the quality of the review can encourage team members to ask specifically for high scores which can leave a very bad impression on the customer. This skews the information obtained through reviews and can disguise real issues affecting the customer experience that need to be addressed.

Things to consider when incentivizing staff to ask for reviews:

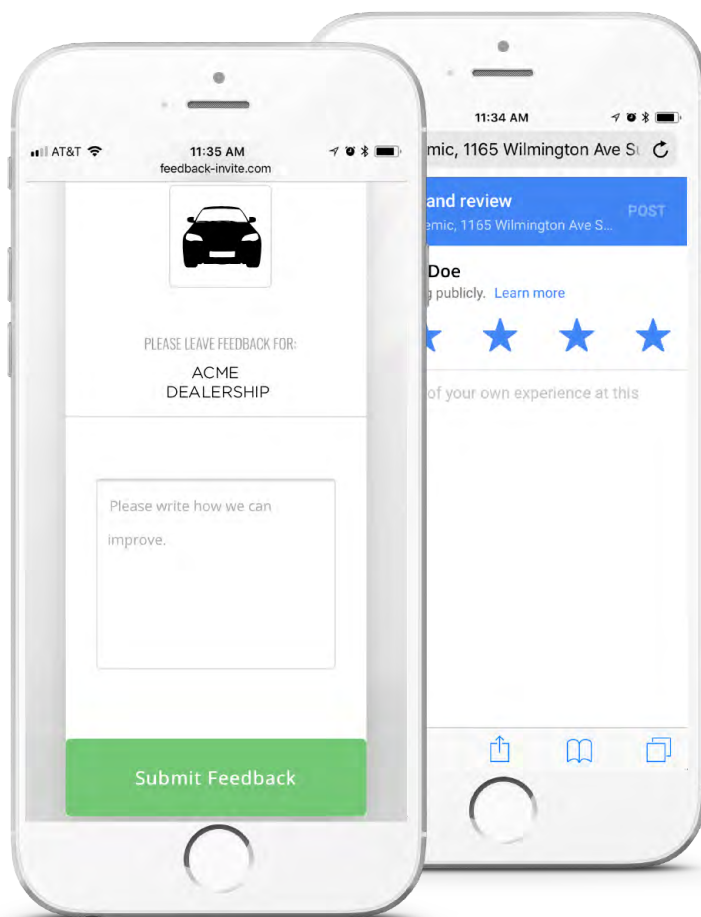
- Have a process in place
- Provide reminders in ALL sales material
- Train Sales and Service teams on how to ask
- Incentivize staff to ask for reviews (not specific quality scores)

#### *Invite them to leave a live review*

The best time to get a review from a satisfied customer is immediately after the sale or service is completed. Using kiosks, an iPad, or even the salesperson's smartphone through a reputation vendor's mobile app, a salesperson can invite a

customer to leave a review while the positive experience is fresh in their minds. Many vendors offer software solutions that make it easy for sales staff to invite customers to leave live reviews, as well as collect additional content like a photo or video.

Live reviews work particularly well in certain situations because they are the most direct form of a request. You can walk the customer to a kiosk or hand them a tablet/mobile device to leave the review. They utilize waiting periods, make it easier to collect additional content like photos or videos, and it is easier to control the platform the review ends up on. In addition to this, you can invite a customer to leave a review immediately after the purchase is made, catching them when they are most excited and willing to provide positive feedback.





## Send them a review invite for later

Sometimes it isn't practical to have the customer leave a review immediately after the sale is completed. In cases like these, you can send them an invite to leave a review at a later time. This option is optimal for customers that have already left the location, or for customers whose experience isn't entirely clear. In this option, you can send a simple text or email with a graphic that invites the user to leave a review or give the customer a business card or flyer with instructions on how to leave a review. Many vendors can provide software solutions for sending electronic review invites, making it easy to send review requests to every customer that comes through your door.

Invites can be sent in three ways: Text message, email, or physical materials.

## Text Invites

Text invites have similar benefits to live review invites but can provide a more comfortable experience for a customer by allowing them to use their mobile device. While the reviews are less immediate than live review requests, text invites can result in more honest feedback from customers who may feel pressured to provide positive feedback if a sales representative is standing next to them while they review. Text invites also have significantly higher open rates than other forms of review invites, making them the preferred choice for many dealers.

Text reviews only work for mobile devices capable of browsing the internet, so consider this before texting an invite to a customer who doesn't have a smartphone.

## Email invites

Email invites work particularly well because managers can fully automate and control the process. Once set up, these systems typically work seamlessly with existing DMS or CRM systems. This makes it easy to ensure that 100% of your customers receive review invites while offering more control over the platforms on which reviews end up. In addition to this, consumers tend to type more on a keyboard than a mobile device, so the feedback received from email invites can be more robust and provide additional details.

While email invites make it easy to ensure that 100% of customers receive review invites, they have an average open rate of roughly 40%, so many of these requests will be ignored.



## Signage, Business Cars, Etc.

Like email invites, physical collateral review invites can reach 100% of customers, and can fairly easily be added to existing processes. Because they need to be reprinted and distributed any time a change is made, they can be difficult to update the review sites you wish to focus on.

### *Respond to the reviews you have*

Customers are more likely to write reviews if they see you care about their opinions. You can show that you are invested in a customer's experience by responding to the reviews that you get - even positive ones. By responding to reviews, and including specific details from the review, you show that the message was received and demonstrate to customers that you are actively working to address any issues that do come up. Not only can responding to negative reviews serve to mitigate or alleviate the impact they have, they also help keep dealership staff accountable.

Responding to reviews is one of the most important aspects of an online reputation management strategy, but it requires organized effort at the dealership to do well. This means that responses are often ignored or forgotten about entirely. Working with a reputation management vendor is a great way to ensure your reviews are being responded to promptly without giving additional tasks to sales staff. We will discuss how to respond to reviews in more detail later on.

### *Encourage reviews with in-store signage*

In-store signage can be a great way to bolster an existing review generating strategy. While signage alone is less effective at generating reviews

than other methods, it can be a great way to remind staff and customers of the importance of customer feedback when paired with other offers or incentives to go to the review platform.

In-store signage is less effective than other methods when used alone, and it can be difficult or costly to update the review platforms focused on. With that in mind, in-store signage should be used as an extra measure to reinforce a complete online reputation management strategy.



## How Can I Improve Review Scores?

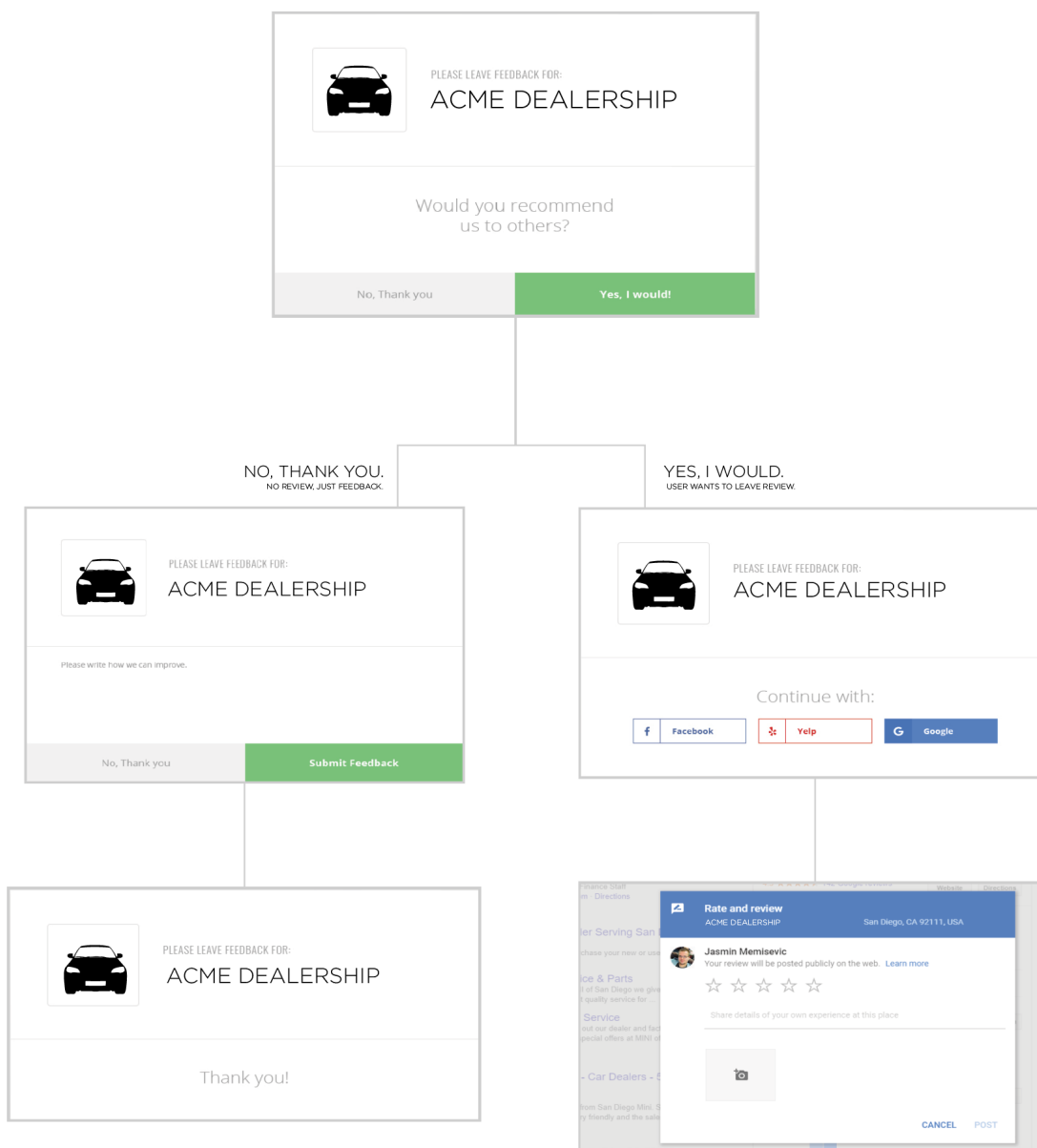
Increasing review quantity will typically result in an increase in review quality. But you don't need to stop there. Many online reputation vendors provide tools to help dealers improve their average review scores by splitting out positive and negative experiences. Sometime after the sale or service order has been completed, a message will be sent to the customer (typically via text or email) asking if they would recommend your dealership to others. If the customer says yes, they are then asked if they would like to leave a public review on one of the key review platforms for auto dealers and are taken directly to the review page.

If the customer says they would not recommend your dealership to others, they are taken to a page where they can provide detailed comments and feedback about their experience. This

feedback is sent directly to you, the business owner, rather than going online in a public setting. Not only does this allow you to take more direct action in rectifying a negative customer experience, but it allows the customer to feel heard without posting a negative review publicly. Sure, the customer still has the ability

to go and leave a public review after submitting their feedback directly, but most will not feel the need to go through that additional step after airing their grievances directly to the company. The result of this process is you get more online reviews from happy customers and more direct feedback from unhappy customers!

### Review Invite Process Example:



# Chapter 4: Managing Responses

Once you've established a presence on all of the key review sites for auto dealers, and taken steps to increase the number of reviews you receive, it is time to turn your attention to responding to reviews. As we mentioned earlier,

customers are more likely to leave reviews if they see you care about their opinions. And you can show that you care about their opinions by responding to reviews - even positive ones!

## How Do I Respond to Positive Reviews?

Positive reviews are the easiest reviews to respond to because you are just trying to reinforce an already positive experience. When responding to positive reviews, try to:

- Use the reviewer's name in your response
- Tailor the response to the review; include specific details from their review
- Make each response unique
- Be enthusiastic and genuine
- Congratulate the customer on their new purchase

## How Do I Respond to Mixed Reviews?

Mixed reviews are reviews that have a high star rating, but negative statements in the text, or an enthusiastic and positive response in the text combined with a low star review. When responding to mixed reviews, it is important to pay attention to both the review rating and the comments and to address the negative aspect of the review as well as the positive.

See example below.

### Example 1: High star rating with negative sentiment in text

James S  
4 hours ago

★★★★★ Typical dealer . If you know what i mean. . Had a jeep on the web site for sale . And mysteriously gone by the time you get there

(owner)  
Just now

James,

*Thank you for your feedback. Your experience concerns me, and I would like to speak with you about your visit. Please contact me at your earliest convenience to discuss your situation further.*

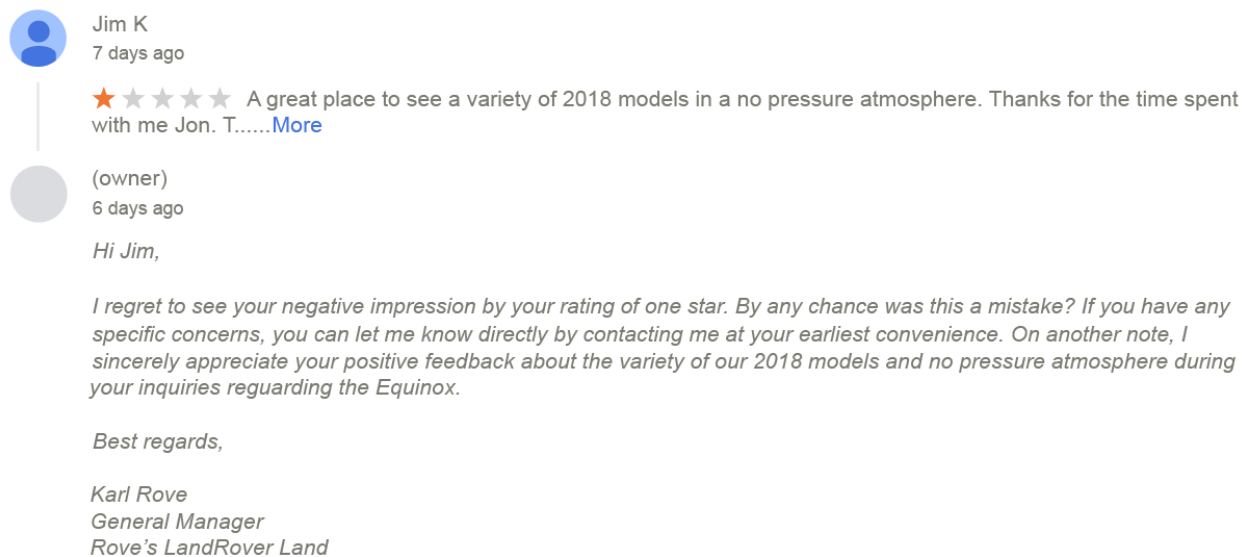
*Best regards,  
Tom Ford  
Tom Ford Ford Lincoln*

Note how the manager thanks the reviewer for their feedback, then goes on to address the negative aspect of their review. The most important part of the response is where the manager asks the customer to contact them at their earliest convenience so they can attempt to rectify the problem.

It isn't always common, but many customers can be persuaded to change a low review after the fact if their issues are resolved in a satisfactory way. Even if the customer doesn't change their review, responding in this way takes the conversation to a private channel and shows other prospective customers that their feedback really is taken into consideration.

---

### Example 2: Low rating with positive sentiment in text



The screenshot shows a review by Jim K, dated 7 days ago, with a 1-star rating. The review text is: "A great place to see a variety of 2018 models in a no pressure atmosphere. Thanks for the time spent with me Jon. T.....[More](#)". Below the review is a response from the owner, dated 6 days ago, which reads: "Hi Jim, I regret to see your negative impression by your rating of one star. By any chance was this a mistake? If you have any specific concerns, you can let me know directly by contacting me at your earliest convenience. On another note, I sincerely appreciate your positive feedback about the variety of our 2018 models and no pressure atmosphere during your inquiries regarding the Equinox. Best regards, Karl Rove, General Manager, Rove's LandRover Land".

In this response, the manager carefully tries to clarify if the 1-star rating was a mistake (it is rare, but it happens), before asking if there are any specific issues contributing to the low score. The manager goes on to thank them for the positive sentiment expressed in the text of the review.

Like the previous example, the manager asks the customer to contact them to discuss a resolution in hopes of turning the negative into a positive, or simply take the conversation to a private channel.

## How Do I Respond to Negative Reviews?

Responding to negative reviews is one of the most important parts of managing your dealership's online reputation. Dissatisfied customers write negative reviews for a variety of reasons that include: getting their problem fixed faster, warning others about their experience, gaining negotiation leverage, or, most often, just helping them feel like they are being heard.

Consider the following when responding to negative reviews:

- **Acknowledge their concerns**, but be careful admitting fault as this can create a negative spiral with reviewers or even have legal consequences
- **Empathize and use positive emotions** to humanize yourself in the eyes of the customer without getting defensive or taking the comments personally
- **Explain how you would like to rectify the situation** (for example, ask the reviewer to contact the manager of the dealership to provide additional details/discuss the situation)
- **DO NOT use the customer's name** or other personal identifying information if they did not provide it in the review - it may be possible to determine who left a review based on details in their comments, but if they did not leave their name in the review they might not want to be identified in a public forum

In every situation, understanding why customers leave negative reviews is critical to being able to address them, and dealers should know best practices for preventing, improving, resolving, and sometimes even removing reviews.

## Preventing Negative Reviews

There are several techniques that should be used to prevent negative reviews from happening: Deliver great service, set proper customer expectations, manage customer perceptions, and let customers feel heard.

**Deliver great service:** The best way to prevent negative reviews is to delivery genuinely quality service! Your dealership should train and incentivize employees (especially at a team level), measure and communicate customer satisfaction (CSAT) performance and use past negative reviews to determine where to focus your efforts.

**Set proper customer expectations:** "Customer satisfaction is the difference between expectation and perception. Reality has nothing to do with it."

Many negative reviews are driven by customers' false expectations of things like inventory availability, loan processes, waiting times, prices, etc. You and your team should educate customers' expectations from the beginning.

For instance:

- Business development centers could explain that a car might sell before the customer comes in
- Sales representatives could let customers know that they may or may not qualify for an incentive
- Service centers could set a price but warn customers that the price could go up under certain circumstances
- Finance offices could warn customers that the loan process could take up to three hours

The following review shows the danger of a customer's false and unmet expectations:

★☆☆☆☆ 7/26/2016

I would give their service department zero stars if I could. I bought my used car from this dealership in April, which I love, but it came with a broken center console lid. I made an appointment to bring it in for repair, as per my sales person, and the service department was unable to fix it, saying they needed to order a part for it. They also told me they would call me when the part was in. A week and a half went by, and I hadn't heard anything so I gave them a call, only to learn that the part WAS in. The guy told me that I wouldn't need an appointment and I wouldn't have to wait because the part just needed to be popped in the console. I came in today in between volunteering and work and was told it would be an hour wait. So I waited, waiting for them to page me like they said they would, and an hour went by but I hadn't heard anything. So I went to check on the status of my car at the service desk and was then told that they had to order another part so I'd have to come back again. Mind you that I also called twice to verify that they had the right part before I made the drive because it was a long one. After I was told this and the sorry for the inconvenience bit, I left. They never contacted me each time they said they would. I wasted an hour waiting there for nothing, late to work, and wasted the fuel I used to get

Just about every complaint in this review could have been avoided by communicating with the customer. It is understandable that parts may need to be ordered for certain repairs, but the customer should have been informed of the time needed for delivery and followed up with as soon as the parts were available. And maybe an appointment isn't typically necessary during certain times of the week, but it never hurts to schedule one to ensure timely service when you know a customer is going to be coming back in a few days. The crux of the reviewer's complaint is that they were not followed up with at multiple points along the way, and this is the easiest thing to resolve. Having processes in place to regularly follow up with customers throughout the service or buying process is an easy way to prevent many potential negative reviews from ever happening.

Customer Communication is **KEY**



**Manage customer perceptions:** Improve a customer's perceived experience by exceeding expectations with clean and beautiful physical facilities, a cheerful staff, things to do while customers wait and small giveaways (candy, toys for kids, car washes, etc.). Establish a benchmark level of service in the customer's mind, then broadcast where your dealership goes above and beyond.

**Let customers be heard:** Everyone at the dealership should strive to address any issues before the customer leaves. The employee working with the customer should be the first to ask about any problems, and front desk staff should be trained to do the same. Something as simple as asking, "Is there anything else I can do to improve your experience with [dealership name] today?" can work wonders. It gives upset customers a chance to voice their concerns, giving you a chance to fix the problem before

they leave. It also shows neutral or happy customers that you are going out of your way to provide excellent service, which can have a powerful effect on review scores. Some dealers even opt to provide a button customers can press or a form they can fill out to express complaints or other feedback. It is important for customers to feel listened to before they leave the dealership.

Even more important than soliciting positive reviews is acting on the feedback you receive to improve the experience for future customers. A particularly effective tool for this is a post-visit survey that directs negative reviews away from public sites and toward your dealership's private feedback system. This ensures that negative feedback goes directly to the people capable of correcting problems while sending happy customers to a review site to publicly share their experience at your dealership.



“ Strive to address any issues *before* your customer leaves ”



## Resolving Negative Reviews

A key component of responding to negative reviews is resolving the issue to the best of your ability. You should address negative reviews with responses that are:

**Customized:** Create a custom response for each negative review, using the first name of the reviewer and specifically addressing their complaints.

**Natural:** Responders should humanize themselves, inviting the customer to contact them personally. Don't sound like a robot!

**Timely:** Respond to negative reviews within at least 24 hours.

Note how the following response incorporates each of the three elements discussed above:

**Barry W.**  
Rio Vista, CA  
52 friends  
32 reviews

1 star 1/3/2018

Went there and spent 2 - 3 hours based on a vehicle that was advertised as being for sale! The one we drove over to view was not there.....according to the sales people it was dealer traded. Then why was that vehicle still on the website a week later!  
Before leaving, our sales person, Lena, stated she would find us a truck and get right back to us. Five days later, nothing. I called and left a message for her, still nothing!

A day or so later, went to [redacted], just to look at a certain vehicle color. Met up with [redacted], and ended up buying one they had there. Very happy with the vehicle and the help we got when we purchased it. I'm hoping the service department will have the same accommodating attitude.

Go to [redacted] for your Ford! See [redacted]

**Comment from Nick P. of**  
Business Manager

1/4/2018 - Thank you for sharing this review regarding your experience with us, Barry. I'd like to discuss this with you further if you could please contact me at your earliest convenience.

Regards,  
Nick P. | GM | NickP. | ... |  
3317 [Read less](#)

# 81%

OF CONSUMERS SAY IT'S IMPORTANT FOR BUSINESSES TO RESPOND TO REVIEWS.

## Improving Negative Reviews

Resolving reviews can sometimes lead to improving low scores. Responding with sympathy and offering help can impress customers and influence them to remove, rewrite, or re-score their original review. If a post-review interaction happens in person, employees should, if appropriate, tactfully ask the customer to update his or her score.

While it didn't turn into a 5-star review, responding to the customer and working to arrive at a solution was enough to convince this customer to update their rating from 1 star to 3!

**Kevin B.**  
Azle, TX  
0 friends

1 star 9/29/2016 • Previous review

I bought an [redacted] from [redacted] in Feb. 2014 and thought the process went very smoothly. At first the service was great but after about a year it got really S-L-O-W and you have to call ahead 2-3 weeks to get an appointment for a simple oil change. Who has time to wait a couple of weeks to get an oil change. That's not my issue though.

**Comment from [redacted] of**  
Business Manager

10/2/2016 • Kevin,

Thank you for your comments. We are glad that your sales experience went smoothly, however, we are troubled to hear about how you've felt about your more recent experiences. Providing upfront and honest communication is very important to us and we want to do all we can to provide exceptional customer service. I'd love to discuss this more, would you mind reaching out when you have a chance?  
Best,  
[Read less](#)

**Kevin B.**  
Azle, TX  
0 friends  
18 reviews

3 stars 10/22/2016 • Updated review

Well, I did finally receive a phone call from Linda at [redacted] She was very apologetic about the way they handled the extra charges on my credit card. I feel her apology was sincere but I'm just left wondering if I would have received a response had it not been for my Yelp review. In any event,

## Removing Negative Reviews

You should never try to remove a negative review simply because it is negative. However, a review can be removed if it clearly violates the platform's community standards or terms of service. Each platform's guidelines differ slightly, but will often include provisions to remove reviews that are abusive, contain hate speech, harassment, or threats, or simply don't talk about a customer's own experience ("I was with a friend who bought a car from \_\_\_.")

Click the links for information on each review platform's community standards. If you believe a review violates these guidelines, you can contact the platform in question to have it removed.

[Google Review Policies](#)

[Facebook Community Guidelines](#)

[Yelp Content Guidelines](#)

[DealerRater Community Guidelines](#)

[Edmunds Membership Agreement](#)

[Cars.com Review Guidelines](#)

[CarGurus Review Guidelines](#)



## Conclusion

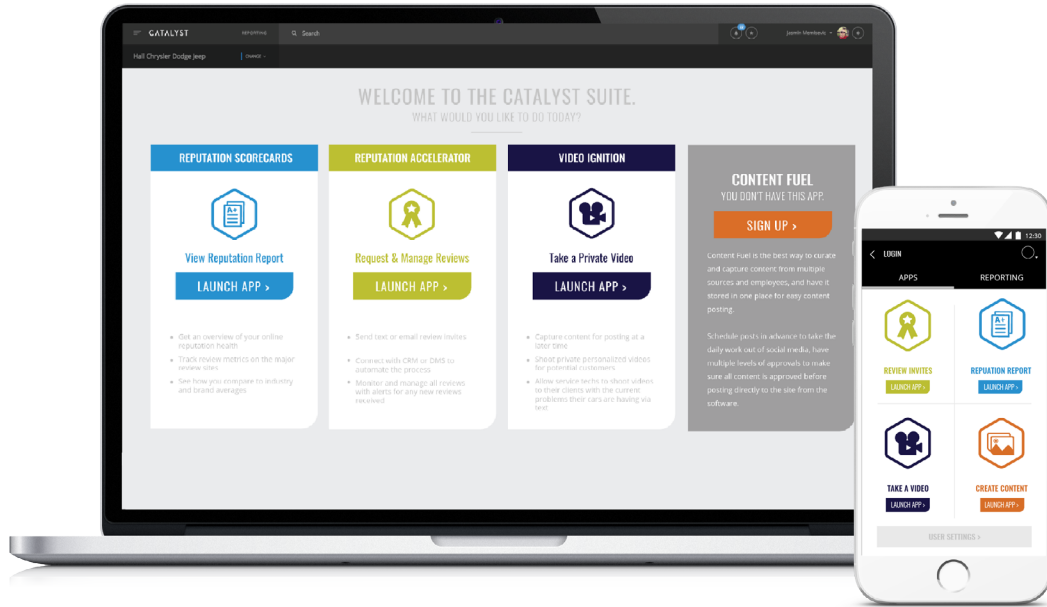
In the era of engagement, consumers expect a customer-centric online experience with a business or brand. With as much as 84% of customers indicating they trust an online review as much as a personal recommendation, it is clear that those businesses who adapt and invest in reputation will thrive. By focusing on

maintaining a presence on key review sites for auto dealers, increasing the number of reviews received by asking every customer for feedback, and making responding to reviews a priority, you can take control of your online reputation, and shape the way prospects and customers alike view your business.



Take control of your online reputation.  
**Leave bad reviews in the *dust*.**

# Friendemic Solutions



Friendemic offers a number of individual, yet complementary products designed to help dealerships and businesses everywhere create an improved customer experience by finding and engaging new opportunities, closing more leads and creating lasting relationships by improving retention.

Whether it's getting more reviews, managing your online reputation, generating leads with personalized content and video, or tracking a range of metrics to help you always know where you stand in the online world, we have a product for that.

## REPUTATION ACCELERATOR



### Request & Manage Reviews

- Automated text or email review invites
- DMS/CRM integration
- Unlimited users per location, with leaderboards
- Hourly review monitoring with text or email alerts for any new reviews found

## VIDEO IGNITION



### Send Personalized Videos

- Capture videos for sales and service and upload instantly to YouTube as private videos
- Send short links in a text or email to the customer, and give them access to a secure and high definition personalized video

## REPUTATION SCORECARD



### Understand your Online Reputation

- Receive monthly recommendations specifically designed to improve your reputation
- Dealers are assigned a letter grade based on key performance indicators
- Indicators include average rating, total reviews, response rate and response time

## CONTENT FUEL



### Create Customer-Driven Content

- Gather and create content stored in a centralized library from multiple locations
- Integrate with all major publishing tools via RSS feed for easy publishing



Friendemic specializes in online reputation tools for many of the world's largest automotive brands, retail-level dealer groups, individual dealerships, and retail businesses nationwide. By building relationships and providing solutions for businesses, we've developed an understanding of their needs with online reputation and social media management. Our tools and software platforms have continued to evolve with our customer's needs into a well-rounded group of tech-enabled services you can trust to grow your brand and credibility. To learn more, visit [www.friendemic.com](http://www.friendemic.com).

© Friendemic, 2018. All Rights Reserved.